

Enjoying Scottish country dance - a guide

- **On entering the event**
 - New dancer? Whether you are new to the area or new to dancing, be assured that you are welcome.
 - If you are not yet a confident dancer, do check the level of the dance with the event organiser (or your class teacher if local) before attending. A formal dance with minimal recaps and no walk throughs can be very stressful indeed. However, most clubs run regular events designed to build confidence in newer dancers and will be happy to tell you about them.
 - Typically, the people at the entry desk will welcome you and call over someone who can introduce you to others. But if this doesn't happen (perhaps you entered at a busy time?) don't be afraid to approach the MC, anyone wearing a club badge or indeed the friendly looking person changing their shoes next to you.
 - Familiar faces: as an established dancer there is a joy in entering a hall and seeing many people whose company you have enjoyed on multiple occasions. As well as greeting friends, do look out for and welcome less familiar faces, perhaps beginners attending their first dance or a visitor to the area.
- **Throughout the event**
 - If you have a problem, do give the MC/organiser the chance to fix it at the time so that you can enjoy the rest of the event.
 - If someone expresses a concern to you, be receptive and recognise its importance to the person who has been brave enough to tell you.
- **Getting ready to dance**
 - Finding a partner:
 - Anyone can ask anyone else to dance - it's part of the charm of Scottish country dancing.
 - If you do not want to accept, it's fine just to say 'no' politely.
 - Don't take it personally if someone declines your invitation, just ask someone else!
 - Keep some dances free for spontaneous partners. It's only human to want to dance with old friends but do keep some flexibility to invite, or to accept invitations, from others who may not know many people there.
 - Less confident dancers:
 - Do listen to the MC or your teacher. If a dance is described as 'for more experienced dancers' take the opportunity to sit and watch.
 - If you are unfamiliar with a dance, do say so beforehand so that your fellow dancers know to help.
 - Be prepared to dance with either sex
 - There are often more women than men, or vice versa. On such occasions it can really help to make up sets if dancers offer to dance with someone of the same sex.
 - Don't assume that two women or two men who have chosen to dance together will want to split up in order to make up a mixed sex couple.
- **Making up sets**
 - Clear the dance floor in between dances.
 - Wait until the musicians indicate the start of the next dance before making up sets
 - Always join the set from the bottom
 - Typically, the person dancing in the top male position in each column of dancers is responsible for counting down the set.
 - Once everyone is counted the person counting should:

- show how many couples are needed to make up the final set by raising one hand with the appropriate number of fingers displayed above their head.
- indicate that all sets are made up by crossing their hands above their head.
- **Being aware of your fellow dancers**
 - Personal space: Whether you are male or female, be aware of your partners' personal space.
 - Offer guidance in the dance if needed but do this by word and gesture.
 - Avoid touching - hands on shoulders etc - apart from the usual hand contact in the dance.
 - Added extras: birling, twirling etc can add greatly to the fun for some however,
 - Less experienced dancers can be thoroughly confused by the addition of extra elements to a dance.
 - Some people simply do not like to birl or twirl - so do check first.
 - If people say they prefer not to add extras into the dance, accept that with good grace. Don't make them uncomfortable by insisting.
 - Eye contact:
 - Catching someone's eye is an important part of Scottish country dance but staring can be off-putting
 - A shared glance is the ideal
 - Injury: do tell your fellow dancers if you have an injury or disability so that they know to take care.
 - Height:
 - If you're taller: consider your height difference and what impact this might have on others.
 - Check how high you hold hands - don't make others raise their arms to an uncomfortable level.
 - Think about your comparative leg length and keep your stride to a manageable length for your partner and the rest of your set.
 - If you're smaller: remember that, when dancing as a man, it's still perfectly possible to dance an allemande with a taller partner.
 - Speed: important both for your partner and for the rest of the set eg when in a circle.
 - If you prefer to move more slowly, don't be afraid to let your set know.
 - If you enjoy speed, check that the rest of your set does too. They may need or prefer a slower pace. If in doubt - ask!
 - Hand and arms: be aware of the strength of your grip and the tension in your arms
 - Too tight: when concentrating on the dance it can be easy to increase the pressure of your hand grip, and this can be painful for others.
 - Too floppy: this can make it difficult to move with your partner, try to keep some tension in your arms.
- **At the end of a dance**
 - Remember, the final chord and the curtsey and bow are all part of the dance
 - Once the chord has sounded, first curtsey or bow to your partner, then applaud the band and the rest of your set before speaking to your partner or others.
 - Clear the dance floor and wait for the musicians to indicate the start of the next dance